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Housewarming

● Richard E. Fitzgerald

The telephone rang in one bell-shaped depression of the hall just off their bedroom. She dashed to the clattering telephone, with the hope on her lips that Jan would continue to play innocuously in her crib in the bedroom and not set up a racket. On the fifth ring Nell Hauser pulled the receiver off its perch, stopping an "a-lingg" half way.

"Hello," she said emphatically, Jan heavy on her mind.

"Well, hel-lo, how do you li-ke it?" the calculated, high-pitched female voice, affecting spontaneity, said, creating a vacuum, as insincerity will, and waited. It was *Grace*. She would bubble over whatever reply came.

"Ohhh. The *house*, you mean." Nell's voice changed to sustain the thin mood of facetiousness. "Oh, I don't know. I guess we'll make do until next month. Then we'll probably be ready for a change: something bigger and more money."

The sharp, dry girlish sound on the other end was undulant, a laugh not wholly given in to.

Nell goodnaturedly chirped. "How do you think we like it! Jim and I have only been saving for six years. But now that we made it, we don't *really* care for it. You know how it is. We miss the apartment, the fights the Ruggles used to have upstairs, and the noise of things breaking on the walls and all. And, of course, I miss carrying the wash up all fifty-eight steps." Fun ran serenely through her words.

"Well, I can't talk long, Nell," Grace said matter-of-factly. "Jim-

my's ready for his bottle. But Johnny and I were thinking we'd come over and visit you in your new house."

"Well, come on," Nell said enthusiastically. "You'll be our *first* visitors." Then her voice returned to its special warmth and in a secretive tone she whispered into the phone, "The mailman hasn't even come in yet."

"Or the milkman?" Good. Grace could stop a second to be human.

"Mustn't talk about him. *Whew!*"

"Then we'd better come soon, or someone *will* beat us there." Grace sounded happy.

"You know we moved in yesterday. My poor husband's unpacking industriously — right now. Don't make it tomorrow, but come as soon after that as you can."

The other end was silent.

"What about Thursday?" Nell said, starting the ball rolling. She knew the ball would have to roll a ways before it would stop.

"I was just thinking. We couldn't make it Thursday. John's parents are coming here for dinner. And Friday . . ."

"It's all set. We'll see you Friday. Come to dinner."

"Friday, I'm afraid, will be out," Grace said dejectedly, relish coating her words. "Little Johnnie has a doctor's appointment late in the afternoon."

"Can't you come that evening?" Nell held firm against her growing annoyance. She felt like saying forget it. But she knew Grace. Grace liked, oh above all, to be conciliated.

"We've been running around so much we're falling off our feet. Friday'll be the only night we'll have to rest. And Saturday, the Turners are coming to our house." She emphasized house. "I just pray they don't stay late."

Nell could hear wooden blocks falling on the bedroom floor. She hung on. Then she said,

"Well, come anytime. We're sure to be home, Grace." She wished she had sounded more cheerful.

"What about Sunday?"

"Fine. By then we'll be all moved . . ."

"Sunday night?"

Jan was beginning to holler. Nell knew she was kicking off her covers about now, and could hear her slobbering with fingers in her mouth, crying. She was hungry and wet. And probably cold.

"Come Sunday night. We'll have dinner together. You'll probably be our first guests."

"I'm afraid we'd better skip dinner, Nell, this time. By the time I can get these two dressed and ready it's eight o'clock. You know how it is. We mothers . . ." Grace laughed to put a period to her sentence. Then she added, "Let's say eight."

"Eight. Okay."

"Johnny's not back to law school till the twenty-fourth, thank God. That's why we're trying to get the things we ought to do out of the way. We'll be there at eight. Gotta run now. Jimmy . . ."

"Eight, all right."

"Can't wait to see it!" She even sounded excited. Jan screaming. Surely she must *hear*.

"Got to run now," Grace repeated suddenly. "Jimmy'll be awake before I warm the bottle. Johnny and I will see you Sunday. Oh, is there room for the children? Do you want

me to bring anything?"

"Just come. Everything will be fine."

"All right. Goodbye. Can't wait to see it."

"Goodbye."

* * *

Dinner and Sunday's dishes were finished and Jan had been sent off by the sandman. At seven-thirty, Nell set out two plates of peanuts, a bowl of crackers and potato chips with a blue cheese dip, while Jim made a correction in the hi-fi wiring. Nell looked exhilaratedly at the freshly curtained windows which lent the inside a warm, friendly feeling even at night. The floors shone with a rich sheen under twin table lamps, and at once the fatigue of the last five harrowing days of putting furniture back together, and finding just the right place in the house for each piece, of nailing and painting, uncrating, scrubbing china and filling cupboards, and burning packing waste — while Jan kept everybody awake nights getting used to the newness — lifted from her in anticipation of receiving her first house guests. Everything was ready. Well, no — heavens no, not quite everything: there was still the ceiling in the nursery and the cracked kitchen tile; then the faucet . . . But, would you just look at the improvement! She was so excited, she was afraid she would jump or worse when the doorbell rang, but then she was calmed by the rush of warmth she felt for her husband, who had given his Sunday to waxing floors and hanging curtains to help her make the Ryans' visit memorable in every way. It would be their way of thanking Grace for all the work she would undoubtedly do to get ready. People need to share blessings, Nell thought. Tonight Jim and I are shar-

ing our new home with our friends. She put *friends* in quotes in her thinking. Then, took it out.

At a few minutes to eight, she and Jim decided to play a hand of gin rummy, sitting on the sofa. Their guests would be there soon. After the first two or three games, Nell did not seem to be able to concentrate very well. She noticed Jim, too, seemed fidgety.

"What time's the clock say, Jim darling, can you see it?"

He stretched his neck back. "Eight fifteen." She noticed he seemed to choke off saying something else.

They played two more hands, eating peanuts. Nell started flagging, and Jim piled the cards together, squaring them, and neatly shoved the pack into the box and inserted the flap.

"That's enough cards," he said. Nell settled back with a sigh.

"What's keeping them, Jim?"

"Grace probably forgot one of the children's caps or something and made John turn back."

"But they'd call."

"You'd think they would!" He tried to keep any bitterness out of mind, out of word.

"They *are* coming, Jim?"

"What'd she say on the phone Tuesday?"

"She said Sunday at eight, definitely."

"She called you, you said."

"Yes."

"Then she knows your number. They'll call if something's happened."

An hour more passed. Jim had turned to tinkering with an old crystal radio one of the men at the lab had commissioned him to fix. Nell was looking through a *Time* magazine and seeing Grace's face on every page.

"If she lost the number, she'd have

sense enough to call information, wouldn't she?" Nell looked out of the magazine to say.

"I think so."

"Jim, I'm going to call them."

He was up on his feet, screwdriver in hand.

"You'll do nothing of the sort. We'll just spend our time as we'd do anyway, and when it's time for bed, we'll go. They'll be here if they're coming."

"They might have had an accident," she pleaded.

"They've been later than this before, so let's just let it go a while longer."

Nell took up her knitting. It was a sweater for Jim. Though she was new at the skill, she kept going long after she believed she ought to throw it away; and now it was actually shaping into something recognizable. For a few moments of the next sixty minutes, she forgot all about expecting visitors. Occasionally, she would look up when she heard a car starting up the hill outside. But doing that made her aware of the time; so she gave up watching.

At ten fifteen, Nell rose unsteadily, propelled herself into the hall, and dropped into the chair there in the dark. Jim found the switch and lit her up sitting pitifully alone by the telephone. She spoke dispiritedly,

"They may be lying dead on the highway somewhere. I'm going to call and see."

Just then the phone buzzed noisily in the quiet hallway. Nell froze. She did not look at the phone. She looked at Jim, who was glaring at the instrument growling at her leg like some ferocious animal. He nodded; she got the signal. Nell cut off the third ring by picking up the receiver.

"Hello." Toneless, breathless.

"Gee, folks, we're awfully sorry."

"It's John," Nell said very nervously, holding her hand tight over the mouthpiece thrust down into her lap. Then she talked into it again.

"John?"

"Yeah, Jay. We got hung up. The next door neighbor . . ."

As though turned to stone, Nell let the phone drop. *The next door neighbor dropped in?* Jim raced to her, saw her look up into his eyes, tears flooding out onto her cheeks. He put the phone to his ear and said forcibly,

"Hello, John?"

"Jim? Yeah, listen I was telling Nell, we got hung up. The next door neighbor came in the second we were leaving to come to your place. He just left. Look, ol' buddy, Grace thinks it's sort of late to get started out at this hour. She's putting the tikes to bed. Say, do you think we'd better postpone coming over? What time is it?"

Jim looked down at the face of his wristwatch, by sheer force of will.

"Ten thirty-eight."

"Yike, is it *that* late? Wanta make

it another night?"

"Maybe we'd better." He was heating up inside like an electric coil.

"Gee, ol' buddy, I *am* sorry. Gee, seems like we're always doing something like this. Good intention, then blow it. I'm sorry. Tell Nell, Jim. We'll do it next week sure. That old galoot next door makes it a habit poppin' in at the worst times ever since we moved in. What can you say to a guy like that?"

Jim couldn't think of anything more to say to John, so he said nothing. He was fighting a compulsion to slam down the receiver when a sudden rush from Nell's full heart cleaned it out of his mind.

"Well, all right, John. Some other time," he said, half-consciously, looking at Nell.

"Righto. Please tell Nell we're sorry, boy."

"All right. Goodnight."

"Goodnight. Sorry, ol' corker."

"All right. Goodbye."

"Sorry."

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

A Bereavement

● Paul Ramsey, Jr.

Go quietly now.

The flesh that gave you love gives up its pain
In the cold maze of circumstance you ask
And ask again.

Colder for questioning, you make your vow,
Regard the world around you, fallen dumb,
And know your task.

While your breath is stayed, your speech alone,
Poor breath to conjure with, must hold all fast,
Lest time go numb,
Lest mountains fall, seas flee, and none know how
The summer stars their orbit quit at last.

Your love is gone.
Go quickly now.

The Dark Room

● Bruce P. Woodford

Sometimes the skin on his body burned, his eyes throbbed dully, and his head ached *what shall we do with him doctor? he won't eat . . .* and he could remember nothing, neither where he was nor by what dark twist of fate or accident he came to be sitting in the chair. And at times it seemed even strange he was anywhere at all. But there he was, his head cradled in long blunt but graceful fingers—a workman's hands—leaning as though lost and motionless at the center of some awful silence over that scrap-littered table. About him and against some large impenetrable and alien darkness that surrounded him and enclosed upon him; only a dim aura of light rendered him visible at all.

He was alone in that single light's source, his dark robe or coat—he did not know which it was—fused and faded off into that penumbra of shadows around him, his face an abstract mask, *but but doctor, a Rembrandt study in cleft planes of light against sockets of shadow suggesting yet deeper shadow merging mirror-like back in imperceptible depths he simply sits there staring at those little blocks of wood. we tried to take them away but he wouldn't let us and he cries like a baby if we so much as touch one no don't take them away nurse. something way back may have started wrong and we simply want to wait and see what he does with them. you see it was the explosion the fire some kind of new chemical*

paint or other they were trying out and the shock of seeing his whole world burn up around him you can imagine. and this regression we're watching it closely may be a chance for recovery to go back so to speak and start over again . . . Even from a short distance sometimes it was impossible to say for certain if his eyes were open or closed, or if perhaps he slept locked in some dream.

But he moved now, felt himself move, raising his head and without turning peered tentatively off into that darkness, that echoless silence, as though listening, as though he had heard or remembered perhaps some step approaching, some word spoken or simple rat scurry behind invisible walls or invaded corners of his room. Oh, how long, long he had waited!

But that night was unutterably still.

He glanced down at the table before him, and upon it, like the disarray of some child's toy or game, that formless heap of small squared blocks of wood. A fine dust filtered and settled over everything, and he stared down as though studying the uncompleted moves in some game with an invisible opponent, his mind probing down along tenuous passages of its own darkness toward some sure and final but yet unimagined capture.

Sometimes his head ached and across his pained eyes flashed long thick and momentarily blinding webs of light through which almost . . .

almost . . . Then he wanted to cry out, give answer to whatever it was calling or seeming to call that disturbed him *a very difficult case nurse. we took the bandages off about six weeks ago and there is no real permanent damage to the physical tissues nothing organically wrong all the old scars healed. but he doesn't respond. he refuses to see us although he sees that table well enough and all he seems to care about are those pieces of wood*

I don't know something rather frightens me about him doctor him sitting that way almost like he knows something we don't. times he stares straight at me or through me I don't know which but like I don't even have any clothes on

now now you'll get used to that working here . . . He lowered his hand now to the table and guardedly watching himself so as not to touch those wood blocks traced with his finger a careful circle about them in the gathering dust.

Sometimes they seemed so small, so far away *was even a dancer once they say almost good as Nijinski but he fell one day and they had to carry him off the stage. he never danced again that was when he was very young . . .* Only darkness he remembered, and alone his mind stumbling down night-blind halls groping toward no door. And where he had answered there had been nothing. A strange wordless, voiceless cry rose in him against that still darkness to no answering cry and his own silence seemed to flow out of him through long fingertips that reached out groping, sometimes clutching at the air but found . . . found nothing *strange after that he became a cabinet maker in his father's own shop and maybe that's why he clings to those little scraps of wood . . .*

How old is he then doctor?

His hand slowly swept a corner of dust from the table.

But sometimes, sometimes his eyes burned too, and his head ached at waking fevers uncoiled living monsters in his veins. In his mind focus, huge beasts lunged upon one another, ripping the brute flesh with their fangs, staining jungle flowers with blood. He saw tall ferny plants crumble beneath the impact of giant scaled bodies, and flames leap from the needle teeth of mountain peaks into the sky like the darting tongues of lizards in the sun fixing their prey to snatch it back into a ravenous mouth. Brute shapes slipped upward from the white breakers along the shore of black volcanic sand and moved away into towering mosses. Great beaked reptiles flapped featherless wings and shrieked in the steaming air. He watched the gaunt upheavals of continents and the sinking coppery crags hissing down into the boiling sea.

He shook his head, and glanced up knew that for a moment he had slept *doctor how old . . .*

couldn't say for certain but above my age I should imagine. can't get any information from him of course and the scar tissue makes it difficult to judge by looking but it lacks the quick-healing properties of a young man . . . But the dream crept stealthily back into the living dream and the old nightmare of his blood-burned now with that awful knowledge of its own flesh-prisoned rage *sure and close this door behind as we go . . .* His body recoiled with its own inward pain and his throat constricted rending the stifling air with a single prolonged but soundless scream into the unechoing darkness.

He thought of the knife.

Plunging a hand into depths

his dark robe or coat—he never knew which—he withdrew and in the faint glow about the table now examined the shining blade, testing its keen edge with his thumb. In his mind, thoughts turned like a cut stone turned in the palm of his hand, reflecting cold fires from its bright facets. He probed down deep into the gem, seeing tier beyond tier open to self-haunted faces in a mirror maze of light reflecting him.

And glancing away sharply now, he caught against the still dark of the empty room enclosing him his own thought's brief after-image like the white-bright shapes of countless carved cameos: against the shell of onyx darkness, his own small countless repeated portrait. He closed his eyes and they were still there against the lids; then opening his eyes again, he watched them slowly fade.

Still clutching the knife now in one hand, with the other he lifted a single wood block from the table, turning it and studying intently its small form, then closing his fingers fiercely upon it. Pain—a pain not of his own blood's making—leaped through him as the sharp hard angles of the wood bit into his hand's flesh. Here! Here was reality!

Suddenly a new and strange fever crept uncoiling into his veins and with a kind of frenzy he began to chip rough corners from the block, until under the keen quick skilled strokes of his knife the wood was reduced to a small crude sphere. For a moment he paused, then split the sphere, taking up half of it and turning it again in his fingers as his mind leaped to that image again of its countless small bright cameos. With his eyes' and hands' steady skill now, he measured and shaped them, but in full forked figure, his

keen blade finding and exposing under the close-grained wood the small naked form of himself. He began a second and a third.

Once as he worked, the knife twisted in the wood's grain and drew blood, but he did not notice except for the stain of it fused into the shape he was making. His head no longer ached now; his flesh no longer burned, and his blood's nightmare somewhere slept. The dust long gathered and inert was swept up quickened from the table by his gestures and scattered in spiraling bright motes in the dim light. And he worked on without weariness or rest.

But presently he saw his work was finished.

There were no more blocks on the table left uncarved *oh doctor doctor come quick . . .* And the old numb ache returned. While he had worked, some weight, some pain or pang of dark solitude had been lifted from him, some longing conquered that he with hope and thought had never conquered; but now finished, his fingers groped out again, straining toward some evasive final form or touch he could not reach *quick doctor see . . .* Dust gathered again in a settling silence over everything, and his eyes burned and some bone-deep exhaustion seeped back into his flesh. Thrusting his hands about his face, he winced again beneath that brooding desire reaffirming itself. Loneliness! Loneliness was endless!

His work too must somehow then be endless *look doctor look at what he's done! but watch out now he's got a knife . . .*

and cut himself a bit with it too. now where'd he get that? must have got into the kitchen yesterday when we couldn't find him. here now old man gently now that's it easy give

*it. why he doesn't seem even to care.
here nurse put it back in the kitchen
please . . . His head throbbed again
and his cold fingers reached out,
touching and clinging a moment to
those desperate small images, clinging
against that vast dusty silence
of his self-prisoned dark look doctor
look he's been whittling on those
blocks what does it mean? does
it . . . without answer, without voices
to answer.*

Voices? Voices, that was it!

As though from a great distance watching some receding of once remembered shores, he sat motionless staring down toward those small inanimate figures crowding the table, as though listening, as though waiting an imagined or belated partner's gambit in an invisible game—until he was no longer certain even if he waked or slept *do you do you think it means something? will he recover you think now?*

hmm I don't know nurse see how rigid set he is now. something has happened to him he seems almost completely withdrawn . . . And he remained unmoved and unmoving, asleep or awake—it was impossible to say which—dreaming of voices. Until is he is he . . .

dead? no not really but only dead in life you might say. we may have very serious difficulties in ever reaching him at all now . . . Somewhere, whether within or beyond him he did not know, but somewhere a wind stirred. Dust lifted with air's warm breath and moved about in gathering whorls over the room's forgotten floor. Wood wracked and groaned; seams burst with the pregnant earth-heaved pressure of living roots. The impact of a flung-open door torn from its hinges sent shuddering reverberations down dark sound-filling halls. Wild tumult rose

through a night of equinoctial storms. Things moved.

Before his eyes' fixed focus, those small figures leaped up now, groping from shadows, dispossessed and naked toward light's source. Torn out of some sleep's coiled shell, they sprang, borne sunward by tongue's first outcry spawned at the sea-surf's retreating edge and water's dark maternal moan deep in the heart's island. Each sought some persisting image from that common sea, and each warm breast heaved with its uncoupled anguish of breath. In a painful outcry and longing, their voices waked the mute mountains, and stones raged with high echoes, wave on wave, pulse toward pulse drawn by their veins' driven rage, while at their feet the grass listened. *we may have to apply the shock treatment again but nothing more we can do here right now nothing?*

no nothing it's too bad. oh nurse we would do best to keep this door very securely closed and locked from now on . . .

Caught now in the sensual rhythms of love's dance, the figures circled a fire's edge, plunged into a twisting soon-spent gyre like bright leaves in a wild wind. Shrill cries shaped in their throats their love's fierce articulation against night's obsessive silence; flesh found its word in flesh before the flames expired with their chant's fury, and frenzied hearts beat drums in blood's hot depths. From far hall or hovel or another world, the born child cried answer to a dying man.

He did not move but leaning above the table, head in his hands, stared down at those figures, hearing or imagining he heard them as they loved and fought, hated and despaired and in despair raised to him

their small countless voices from their own dark rooms. And he sat leaning and watching and hearing until dust settled again about and upon him, and from even a short

distance he was indistinguishable now from the imaged monument or giant fetish some nameless sculptor carved in wood or living stone.

Jim

• Raymond Roseliop

We classmates saw no poetry in him:
his dirty colored flattop showed some scars,
loose patches furled the pattern for his ears,
a crazy diver in his eyes could swim,
and nostrils caved a spiderwork of hairs.
We often joked about the outward Jim.

He grinned because he liked his life, or laughed
until the gawky angles of his frame
would bend so far we judged the lathy bone
had aimed to crack. But frowning telegraphed
a code that hinted at a buried pain
or druid prompting to an ancient craft.

And while we dug in prosy tomes that free
the intellect (as wiser Plato claimed),
and tunneled to divide and understand
the gay-sad root below man's mystery,
he sought a knowledge past our books, or found
it—and we scoffed—in woodland poetry.

He ran the oddest ritual in spring.
The grove along our campus rigged the shrine
where he would scrape his kneecaps till the green
met blood, in worship of a leaf or wing,
some fur, a tendril, or a violet flame.
For him a lyric of the earth could sing:

he knew by love its light, and loved its shadow.
He was the Nature Boy, we jeered. Her child,
we cried when tomes had sunk for tombs and jailed
us all, save him. And in this dull tomorrow
he mocks our corpses, hollow-eyed and stale:
he chants of merry graves, of bookworm sorrow.

Symposium on the Teaching of Creative Writing

In the first issue of the current year, *Four Quarters* began the presentation of the best responses to the survey on the teaching of creative writing conducted by the editors in August 1960. Upon the large body of generous and provocative essays, a broad general tripartite division has been imposed making installments possible. The first group were teachers of writing, mainly, with stress upon the pedagogic half of the term. In the present installment, as if to prove how indefinite a division can be, the contributors to the Symposium are writers who teach.

As happened last time, a certain element of good fortune is running for these inclusions. Not only have the first three well-known authors taken time to fashion articles that probe far beyond the facile epigram, but many others have stolen the moments needed for original shorter replies which round out the Symposium. Among these, readers will recognize writers who have read from La Salle's stage during the last year, affording several delightful hours of literary pleasure.

The editors have made a determined effort to avoid name-dropping amid all this abundance. While not ungrateful for the brief responses that are left unprinted, they have tried to avoid undue repetition or fragmentation, even at the cost of omitting some famous names.

In the March issue of *Four Quarters*, attention will be centered upon the essays of academic officials and of a variety of established personalities whose responses to the survey will make short contributions to the Symposium.

The Editors.

● Anthony West

I have no real foundation for my strong belief that creative writing courses are a waste of academic time other than strong feeling. I have never taught such a course or seen one in action. Frank O'Connor, to give Michael O'Donovan his pen name, is a writer I admire and respect, and he tells me that there is virtue in them, so I am compelled to doubt my prejudice against them, but it remains strongly implanted in my mind.

The grounds for my feeling are an external observation of writing produced by writing-course trainees and a slight acquaintance with people who have felt themselves able to teach this most curious of subjects. To take the second heading first, I have never, with the single exception of O'Connor,

encountered a writer qualified by maturity and accomplishment for the teaching in question. They have been mostly young and inexperienced writers of a very uncertain quality who were incapable, I would say, of seeing outside the problems of their own writing. I gathered from them a very strong impression that they taught their own problems and laid very heavy stress on their own areas of uncertainty when teaching.

My impression—and I stress again that it is only an impression—is that most creative writing courses teach pastiche, because they are conducted by persons who are in a stage of literary development in which they are relying heavily on models drawn from the work of writers they admire. I judged the entries for an annual award made by a midwestern college one year and was amazed by the way in which the entrants, all members of creative writing classes, had produced pastiches, in some cases verging on parody, of the works admired by their teachers. The list of models was deplorably short, and none of the entries showed evidence of any wide acquaintance with the general body of fiction of the Western world.

I think this is the important objection in my mind to the creative writing course as such. It launches the would-be writer onto the consideration of specific technical problems prematurely, before he has done sufficient general reading. This question is linked to another one, the approach to novels of current teaching of literature in which the student is introduced to deep analysis of specific novels before he has read many novels, and often without reading all, or even a representative selection, of the work of the novelist under consideration. I do not think anything useful can be learned about, say, *Bleak House*, without considering *Bleak House* in relation to (a) the totality of Dickens' work, (b) the personal situation of Dickens at the time of writing, and (c) the development of the novel in England and in the west at the time.

You will see that the joker is in (b). I believe that all creative writing is the product of an urgent inner necessity; the writer writes because the development of his psyche forces him in that direction and no other. I do not think a man really chooses to become a writer. When he makes it a matter of choice at the undergraduate or postgraduate level, he is choosing the social status and repute attached to success in writing. A man who is going to be a writer will be taken over by writing anyway. At the immature phase of his adult life, which ends when he is around 26-28, he is much better employed in (a) reading voraciously anything which attracts him (it will have bearing on his necessities as a writer if it does; it won't if it doesn't); and (b) acquiring as full an experience as possible of non-literary adult life, preferably by mastering a profession of some kind; and (c) writing his own stuff in his own way, committing all those errors of judgment, taste, and common sense which can only be worked out and which cannot be ruled out. At the end of this course, the writer will emerge speaking with his own voice and saying what he has to say, and which nobody else has to say.

I am afraid my feeling is that the product of the creative writing course comes out of his training in writing about "literary" experience gleaned from books, and doing it in the spirit of a well-trained circus horse. Some of the

products are quite pretty, but not really worth very much.

All this is extremely negative in tone. I am saying that what is valuable in literature cannot be taught. On the positive side, I would say that the basis of writing, the actual use of language, can and should be taught. But I am sure that it should be taught in high school and earlier, long before university and college levels are reached.

● Ray Bradbury

Certain aspects of creative writing can be taught. Courses in creative writing are valid if the end product is stories written and activity stimulated on many levels, regarding literature.

When I lecture, I talk about two things, or three, at the most. Mental hygiene for the writer, for instance, which seems very important to me; discipline in all its forms and, strange to some people, morality. I try to emphasize habits, good ones, formed early and kept at, to replace bad ones established in other years. Here is where I believe teachers can be of great service in helping students who want to be writers. We can cut short certain agonizing practices when we see them being carried out, and thus save the student precious time. Otherwise, like the inchworm, they may circumnavigate the same tree limb for years without knowing they are retracing old steps.

Trying to be perfect first time out is one habit we can break them of. Telling them to let go with their emotions and get things on paper is a far better thing to encourage. Criticism can *follow* the writing act, but does not belong inside of the process save later, as a subliminal creative censor that can do the work without spoiling the fruit.

The art of cutting is another thing which, I think, in many cases, can be taught. Not everyone will learn it well, but students can be hit over and over again with the fact that once they have made a point, they must go on to fresher points, or if a point must be repeated, a fresh way must be found to do so. All these are valid ways of going at writing—errors that can be corrected, habits to be learned, sometimes by rote, until they move into the sides and bottom of the mind where they will do their work without being noticed.

I have been very strict with the few students I have taken on over the years, and set them regimens that were in some ways harsh but, in the end, tonic. I told them they must write one story, or its equivalent, a week, fifty-two weeks a year, for five or ten years, in order to have the luxury of burning millions of words, in order to wind up with some good ones. I've tried to teach that success is a process, failure is a stoppage. The man who keeps moving and working does not fail; he continues to learn. The man who stops work fails of his goal. I've tried to clarify the difference between this view and saying you have failed when a story has been poor or mediocre. Stories are part of a process, and I have yet to see great quantity that did not wind up one day as eventual quality—if quality is the

sincere goal of the writer we are concerned with.

I would try to help a writer develop what moral sense he has, for if he is sincere about writing, he will wind up writing about morality by the end of his life, whether he is conscious of it or not. I would try to tell him that if he behaves poorly in society, his subconscious might give him trouble in his work. I base this on observations of many friends—artists, musicians, writers, who have come on dry spells in their lives through thinking they could separate their social from their aesthetic life and get away with being a villain in one, an attempted saint in the other. I have tried to show my writer friends what a marvelous thing the subconscious is if fed properly on good books, good friends, good experiences, as well as a healthy respect for evil, sin, or whatever they themselves might wish to call it, in the world, for practical, if not religious, reasons.

I have tried to teach people to leave well enough alone. When a story goes poorly, it is best to walk off from it and do other things, to take long walks, to paint, to listen to music, to work on a play perhaps, or a poem, or some other literary form. I have moved steadily through a series of forms over twenty years, in order to retain my zest, in order not to be bored, to give my subconscious time to find its own answers to what seem insoluble problems. I have never forced a story. If it is ready to be lived, I let it live itself out. If it looks like a long labor, I bide my time, read, converse, and stuff my senses with new information that might be of use.

All these, I repeat, are things that can be taught, shortcuts to realizing the better self. I think an ideal short story teacher should be a man of tremendous enthusiasm, love for life, and love for life as reflected in literature. I think he must transmit this to the students, tell them, or imply anyway, that he respects them and loves them, each one for his own individual potential, and get them to their typewriters while they are still flying on the elation he has let pour out of his fingertips. He must be the “attention payer”; he must wisely compliment and wisely criticize and wisely compliment again. A large order for big classes. Better small classes.

Best of all, however, is one night a week where five or six students meet with a teacher at his home and read aloud for hours and help each other, guided by a few older heads. Four or five students, a teacher, and a pro writer sitting in would make for much energy, good talk, fine times, and better writing. We all need, as writers, to know that others exist who dream, work, hope, lose ground, move on, even as we dream, work, move. I've belonged to a group of writers for twelve years now, and we commiserate with each other and laugh with each other over our successes and apparent failures. But for most of us, somewhere, early or late, there was a teacher who took some time to appreciate and encourage and love.

I would want my students, if I taught regularly, to know some basic psychology, but would warn them not to be victimized by Freud or Jung, since to follow any one school seems suicide to me. I would encourage them to broaden their views politically; I would want them to read much poetry every year, for there lies the wondrous metaphor, many of which expand wonderfully into short stories at a touch. I would encourage essay reading, again for ideas and for unusable knowledge that some day is of use. I would

want them to dip into philosophy and religion, and I would certainly want them to have knowledge of their own bodies and senses; so a course in physiology would not be amiss or, at least, reading a few of the better books on same.

In other words, I would put my students into a rigorous training, just as Stanislavsky trained his actors to dance, fence, do gymnastics and acrobatics, though they might never do any of these things on stage, in order to train the body to be ready for any action or counteraction that might be asked of it some day. To be fully trained is to be relaxed, and to be relaxed, I have observed, is to be most creative. Within the passion that seems tense, while one writes the story, is the perfect control that comes with perfect relaxation, where one does not think, one *does . . .*

I would also ask students to see many films every month and week of their lives, and many plays, so as to find out what is going on in all the literary forms. I would want them to know the better comic strips because here is literary shorthand pared down to its rawest essentials: "Peanuts," if you wish; "Krazy Kat," in his day; "Pogo" — make your own list. There is quality everywhere in the world: in the midst of decadence, corruption, and just plain give-me-the-cash-and-let-the-credit-go.

I would ask them to remember to love and have fun in their work, for I believe that great fun and joy are the heartbeat of all good and great art. It must have been fun for Molière to prick the balloons of vanity, as it was for Bernard Shaw. What grim elation must have been Shakespeare's, writing his tragedies; must have been Arthur Miller's when writing *Death of a Salesman*. Because a thing is serious does not mean that one wears a long face or loves or enjoys it less in the writing.

To sum up, any subject can be taught if the teacher has *élan* and dedication. The problem is finding teachers who care enough about life and the whole damn wonderful mystery so that they will go out and dance the students around and make them care in a time that has forgotten how to have goals and has become too blasé and too "show me" about everything.

● John Knowles

Techniques of creative writing can certainly be taught. Everyone agrees that creativity itself cannot be taught: this is obviously true by definition. But how a writer externalizes his conception of a character, how he puts on paper the conflicts and insights and experiences which, in his view, make up life—those techniques can to some extent be taught.

Courses in creative writing are valid if they are good courses; it's as simple as that. A good course probably is good to the extent that it makes the student write. The more he writes, the more surface trash he gets out of his system. Lots of writing will force out many bad students also. A bad course would, I think, be one which emphasizes many lectures and lots of examination of the work of famous writers. Too often this will confuse the student and make him self-conscious in his work. Give students guideposts in technique and then let them write and write and write.

● Nathaniel Benchley

I don't think there is an unqualified answer to either of the two questions. I think that creative writing can be taught—although *taught* is perhaps not quite the word—only if the instructor limits his demands to clarity of thought and expression and provides the stimulus necessary to encourage creation in a student. If he tries to do more—if he tries to develop a certain style or way of thinking or method of expression in the student, then he will most likely strangle whatever latent creativity there may be. In other words, it all boils down to the teacher; a good teacher can do it, and a bad one cannot, and I should imagine that that would answer the second question as well.

Any course in writing is "valid" if it makes a person write, because the only way to learn how to do a thing is to do it. And, although this is off the subject, I think that for this very reason, schools of journalism are a waste of time; the only way to learn journalism is to work on a newspaper.

● Sean O'Faolain

It is obviously impossible to insert a power of creativity into a man who is not, literally, "gifted" with it. Yet, one knows that there are techniques which can be taught—to young composers, painters, musicians, actors, and so on. In this sense, a creative writer can learn and, ergo, can be helped to learn, i.e., taught. Creative writing courses are thus patently valid. That few writers emerge is beside the point. It has often been said that the number of "painters" who go to study in Paris annually must be thousands: the number of painters who emerge very, very few.

Whether universities are the right loci for such courses is debatable. Where else could they be? I wish they could be elsewhere, or also elsewhere. But where?

Apart from teaching techniques to "writers" or writers, however, creative writing courses surely have another value—they develop a practical, critical, and appreciative power in those who, by attempting to make, come to a better knowledge of the thing made. Why is so much academic teaching called "academic"? Because it is remote from the practical? From the practice? From the passion, and the struggle, and the pain, and the effort, the trial and error, the hopes and despairs, the lonely, patient devisings of the craftsman-artist? It must help us to appreciate a Chippendale table to have made even a wooden box well. I needn't labor so evident a point.

I would keep numbers very small in such courses. No teacher can cope with more than nine students per week—that is nine individual conferences on nine manuscripts: the only way that is worth a damn. Class lectures are quite futile apart from "close-up" lab work on each man's efforts. I have found, too, that it is only after about four or five months that I begin dimly to perceive what (if anything) a young student may be driving at. . . .

● Jean Stafford

I don't think creative writing can be taught, although, on occasion, I have made a stab at teaching it myself. I do think that it is valuable to the young writer to be in the neighborhood of established writers. When I was in college in the thirties, these courses had not yet begun (at least not at the University of Colorado), but during several summers, I worked as secretary to the Writer's Conference; how much I actually learned from listening to Ford Madox Ford, Robert Frost, Sherwood Anderson, John Peale Bishop, and others, I cannot say. But I do think I profited in some way.

Writing is so personal a discipline, so very slow in its evolution that it can be learned only from practice and from contemplation. Writing cannot be taught, but *reading* can; it is through intelligent reading that the writer learns structure and rhythms and accents. The recipes are embedded in literature; they can't be abstracted and set down in a neat set of instructions.

● Allan Seager

Since writing courses vary greatly in their aims and the ways they are conducted, I can only discuss my own. I can promise that any student who will work a year with me will accomplish two things:

He will experience some thing valuable in his education; that is, he will make a short story or a poem. These may not be good stories or poems, but the experience will be valuable because it will be new and germane to his development as an educated man. Students' experience with literature is entirely critical until they take some course in the arts where they must make something. Their experience is from the outside and *post hoc*. Once they have done it themselves, well or badly, their insight into literature increases with a jump.

He will learn to read literature. Few students read anything well. Fewer read poems, plays, fiction except superficially. To write in one of these forms forces attention. Aware of many of his own intentions in writing, a student becomes aware of other writers' intentions, and his comprehension of what he reads increases greatly. This never fails to happen.

The two points above will apply to any student. I also have many who have already begun work in writing. I am not at all interested in having them "express themselves," that is, to regale the reader directly with their vagrant emotions but to try to induce them to comprehend the world objectively. Beyond this, our discussions are largely technical. So far, I have avoided a nomenclature for this.

 John O'Hara

Creative writing, or literature, comes from all sorts of people and all sorts of places; so I do not rule out the possibility that it may come from a creative writing course. But there really is no short cut to good writing, and no way to learn it except to write. If my daughter, now fifteen, should want to write, I would urge her not to take a creative writing course. The time would be better spent in Latin or Greek, French or Russian; or in history or physics or in political economy or in philosophy.

The word *creative* seems to contradict the idea of writing as a teachable art. The word *valid* . . . also disturbs me. Valid is one of the most misused words in modern jargon. It is an egghead favorite and almost never correctly used. It is one of those words like *dichotomy*, *denigration*, *ambivalence*, and God knows how many others that I consider show-off words. Instead of trying to teach "creative" writing, students should be taught how to spell and to respect the language. How many creative writing students can use *who* and *whom* correctly? . . .

Most students who want to be writers are looking for a life of undisciplined ease, and the product of creative writing courses proves it. If you're going to write, nothing will stop you, but writing is strictly a do-it-yourself enterprise.

 Sister Madeleva

If creative writing can be taught, novelists, dramatists, poets should be, or could be, as numerous as engineers, scientists, teachers, experts in our various professional fields. The fact that they are not, implies a qualification or a condition or both essential to creative writing and apart from the most excellent instruction.

This qualification is a distinct gift, a natural aptitude which no teacher can communicate but which a good teacher can do much to develop. The same can be said of the gift of a singing voice or other musical or artistic talent.

Courses in creative writing are not only valid but desirable. The possible poet, novelist, or dramatist needs desperately an atmosphere of creative aptitude, stimulation, encouragement, companionship. Courses in the stuffs of creativity, in the ways and means of using such materials cannot fail to produce commendable efforts in writing and the unforgettable and rare experience of discovering even one student gifted with creative ability.

Even without such unique discovery, students in these courses will come out of them with a new sense of wonder in the use of words. Herein lies the validity of such study; in the beginning was the Word and for all eternity, the Word is God.

● Katherine Anne Porter

You have said in your letter that creativity cannot be taught, and I agree with you entirely. Writing, that is methods and techniques, syntax, sentence structure, all the mechanics, can be taught, but the creative force is one of the great mysteries of being: it cannot be summoned or invoked—it is there already in certain individuals, an indweller. I think the case against teaching untalented people the tricks of the writing trade, encouraging them to write when they have nothing of any use to say, is that they waste their time and add to the great trash heaps of the world. The case for it, I suppose, is that while they are learning to write, they are, or should be, learning to read at the same time, my theory being that once such minds are exposed to real literature, they—some of them—may learn to prefer it to the second rate; or at least they cannot pretend to ignorance anymore.

But as you may know, I am much opposed to wasting higher education on lower minds: the effect is that the lower mind simply pulls education down to its level. I have been visitor or lecturer or writer-in-residence for twenty-six years; some of my earliest students are now grandparents—very young ones! I have visited some 180-odd universities and colleges in that time, and I think some of our current fiction proves my argument too dismally. No amount of education, instruction, example can lift an inferior mind above its own level. But exposure to higher education has made some of them pretty cocky—they know now there's nothing to it; the old phrases of envy and inferiority "I'm as good as you are" or "You're no better than I am" have changed to "I'm common and low-brow and I like it—that's the way to be!"

Are creative writing courses valid? This is difficult. I should think teaching this subject would be valid as any, provided the teacher knows his work and is in good faith with his students; and, after all, in any body of students there will be ten percent who are worth educating, and of these, two percent who will have a measure of creative genius (these are very optimistic figures!) and lucky the teacher who once in a long season lands one of these in his net . . . If I seem a little moody, please be sure it is not just mood. My disillusion with the teachability of the mediocre mind is real, and based on experience. Nothing can raise it above mediocrity.

● James A. Michener

If one divides the writing process into two components, which is not an illogical thing to do, one finds that they are the technical skill of putting words down to convey ideas and the genesis of ideas that are worthy of being put down and shared with other people.

Since the first is a skill, it obviously can be learned, for any skill is almost by definition something which the would-be possessor can acquire through the application of will power. Now, whether this skill can be taught

by a second person to the person who wishes to acquire it is a rather delicate matter, but I would be of the opinion that it certainly could be. Therefore, creative writing courses which have as their purpose the teaching of the skills necessary for the job of writing are certainly justified, and I believe that this is not merely a philosophical question because there have been quite a few great teachers in the last few years who have been able to impart to large numbers of their students ideas which led to the cultivation of real skills. The testimony on this, I think, is rather overwhelming.

A more important question is whether any course can teach a would-be writer the genesis of important content and its organization in an artistic form which the reader can enjoy. I oftentimes doubt that this can be taught, and without it, any writer is going to be rather empty.

I therefore come to the conclusion that the best possible training for a writer would be a first-class, intensive, hard-drill course in the structure of the language and its use for persuasive purposes, plus a wide variety of courses in art, literature, philosophy, religion, aesthetics, and perhaps even geography. Out of this latter group the would-be writer may acquire those insights which will encourage him in the genesis of great ideas. I believe that the development of concepts that are worthy of reproduction in literary form comes mostly from the contemplation of philosophical matters, and I would suspect that this very desirable component of the writing business cannot be taught *de novo* as a thing by itself. It probably has to come through the contemplation of great precepts.

I would therefore conclude that courses in creative writing are of value if they are not thought of as substitutes for the real work that every writer must do, namely, the development of his own intellect and spirit.

● Frank O'Connor

Writing courses are good when the teaching is good; disastrous when it isn't . . .

Literature is a craft as well as an art, and one can, of course, teach the craft—if one knows it oneself. At the same time, there are writers and writers; there are the intuitive ones who do really pour it out—"throw back their heads, shine their eyes, and leave the rest to God," as Abraham Lincoln put it—but there are also the craftsman writers who are always trying to learn and will learn from anybody. Nobody would ever want Walt Whitman in a writing course, but William Butler Yeats would be bound to pick up something interesting and useful. One can teach a student to isolate and consider his subject before he begins to write about it; when he has really mastered its significance to himself, one can help him to illustrate it without irrelevancies or redundancies, so as to bring it within manageable proportions. If he goes into a newspaper office, he'll be taught it soon enough by the first copyreader he meets who knows his job. If he works in the theater, he'll learn it from a director or a good actor. So why not a college teacher?

I don't like the term *creative writing*. All good writing is creative.

● Paul Bowles

I am inclined to be skeptical about the value of any formal instruction to the creative individual—that is, if the instruction is presented as a means of acquiring technique. If, on the other hand, such a course does not presume to do that but concentrates instead on the relationship between thought and language, then it can be beneficial; of that there is no doubt.

Certainly no one can be taught to be a writer or a composer or a painter or a sculptor; he can only be stimulated to consider his subject from points of view which are not his own; but since this is indispensable, particularly to the young, any course which can provide such stimulation without imposing a set of values is useful.

Writers will write, with or without creative writing courses. What is important is that they be clear about what they want to say, and that they have the means of translating their thought into the most accurate verbal form possible. If there are classes which can give them those two things, then such classes are extremely valuable.

● Flannery O'Connor

Unfortunately, there is a kind of writing that can be taught; it is the kind you then have to teach people not to read. This does not mean that writing courses are not valuable, but that their value is limited to doing a few things which will help the student with talent to a greater critical awareness. A good writing course can do two things: show the student what, from the writer's point of view, great literature is and give him time and credit and criticism for writing of his own if his gift seems to merit it. If such a course is directed by an intelligent teacher who is not interested in impressing his own image on the writing of his students, it can be very valuable and can save the student many false starts.

● John Ciardi

I have just about written myself out on this subject, and I am afraid I can only repeat myself. The gist of my feeling is that writing cannot be taught, but that a good writing coach (I wish the term might be *coach* instead of *teacher*) can help the right students' self-churning learning process. What a writer needs is inventiveness—and there is no possible course in that. Given a bright young inventor, however, the right coach can be useful, sometimes enormously so.

I sometimes wish students could be penalized 3 academic credits for every writing course they take: not because I am against writing courses, but because I wish students took them for purer (and more devoted) reasons.

• Art Buchwald

Creative writing can be helped. You can't teach anyone to be creative. You can only help someone who is creative. I took creative writing in college, and since I had a wonderful teacher, I found myself inspired to write something good, knowing he would read it the next day.

Since most young people starting out do not have outlets for their works, the professor of creative writing must be the person they're writing for. The student must be encouraged, no matter how bad his efforts are. Unfortunately, it's hard to grade in a creative writing course. I think, though, any creative writing course should be tied up with a publication so that the students feel they're writing in hopes of getting published.

I believe that courses in creative writing are valid and the students get something out of them. I did—thanks to my professor at the University of Southern California. Writing is tied up with *ego*. A good teacher can help a struggling writer's *ego*. That, in itself, is worth the price of tuition for the course.

I am all for creative writing courses—but, like everything else, it depends on the teacher whether it will be a successful course or not.

• Frank Brookhouser

Creative writing cannot be taught—completely. I don't want to be mystic or anything, but I think that to some extent writing has to be born in a person and it grows right along with him. And I think that the best way to become a writer, to learn writing, is simply by, first, reading and then writing. The reading should be wide and varied (from classics to newspapers), and of course the direction it is given from age six to, say, twenty is extremely important. A person is lucky indeed to have parents and teachers and friends who furnish the right direction.

Most certainly, creative writing courses are valid. They cannot teach creative writing—completely. But they can be helpful, as classes in any subject can be. The writer can be stimulated and helped by the advice and suggestions given by the teacher who, presumably, knows much more than he does, as well as by the informal discussions that take place with the other aspiring writers. I don't know of anything that could replace them—except reading and writing—and naturally they constitute a solid supplement to that.

• Brother Antoninus

As far as I can remember them, the chief value of writing courses was that they brought together people interested in writing at the age they needed it most. For me, this experience constituted the "intellectual awakening"

and helped crystallize my dominant intellectual attitude. Moreover, if one has a fine teacher, the experience can be profound.

However, the danger of these courses is that the semi-public discussion of work is destructive to realities of depth—makes for emphasis on surface techniques, etc. It takes a tremendously powerful creative mind to stand up against the superficial destructive criticism usually found in these courses. This is why so many powerful writers leave school half-educated—they can't stand the gaff. Their unconscious values are so unformed it will take years to shape them, and their deficiencies are only too apparent. Among the bright, eager surface writers, prematurely slick and sophisticated, their primitive mentality has no defense. They leave. But they avenge themselves later on the institution that offended them with a terrible and immortal wrath. So be careful what you do with that painfully shapeless young giant staring at you from the back of the class, who never seems to have any answers but always asks the right questions.

A Summer Meant for Melville

● Charles Edward Eaton

“Who in the rainbow can draw the line where the violet tint
ends and the orange tint begins?”

Billy Budd, Foretopman

Strange season, too much heat around the heart—
Flame azalea, iris, simultaneous in bloom:
Melville’s ambiguous rainbow
Made tolerable by being stretched apart.
Earth is indeed a well-set room:
Green between orange and purple-glow.

Antitheses are tasteful when we know
They fade and die upon a natural bed
Of something clashing colors never said.

Dear earth, that, in its way, would never be unkind,
Sometimes, like Melville and his rainbow-mind,
I wish to see divisions all air-borne,
The hot heart needing rain for nothing more
Than what, so formally forsown,
Might make of tears a blended door.

Iridescent, deluging moment—once more horizontal,
I shall have wept with him who could not turn
Back to unconverted earth’s still solid Fall.

Wonderful

• Emilie Glen

Two birds fought above the swimmers' heads. Birds were always flying above the waves, coexisting in blue oceans of air. Gulls soared high and white; tern skimmed, dipped; sanderlings strip-winged by, barely clearing the barrel floats, but these two birds at each other, had no look of the sea.

The bigger bird, dark spotted, fierce flying, dive-bombed the flutter grey dodging in ragged circles. Downed by a jab, the sparrow-like bird listed almost to wave snatch.

Randy pushed forward on her raft. "Higher, silly, higher," she screamed at the bird, "the waves will pull you in."

Wings folded to a trough, tried to beat free. A wave broke over, rushed the bird to shore, backwashed it out. Randy waded after the bit of dark, caught it on her raft, lifted it, warrior on shield to shore. She rested the raft on a miniature sand cliff cut by the surf; knelt to the bird.

Corey swam in from the barrels. "Did you save it? Did you save it? I saw it go down." He crouched for a better look. "Why, it's a bat."

"A bat? How can you tell? Bats don't fly out to sea, do they?"

"They do if they're chased out. I saw a picture in my bird book. That's fur, not feathers, and the wings are like folded umbrella ribs. Actually they're elongated forelimbs. Bats may be a whiz at flying, but they can't walk."

Nina dragged her raft over. "All that fuss over a stupid bird—"

"Look out, you're dripping on it"—Randy sheltered the bat with her arms—"soon as the sun dries its wings, it will fly."

"No, it won't — it's stinking dead—"

"Can't you see it's breathing?"

"So what? So it's breathing? Who cares?"

"So I care."

Nina slammed out on her raft. Settling herself before the bat, Randy leaned on her elbows up the small sand cliff, toes in surf wash. Corey walked an oblong around the raft, studying the bat from all sides. The beach club guard muscled over. "Better keep back—bats bite."

"That little thing?" Randy pushed sun-streaked bangs out of her eyes. "Why it's only a baby."

"Grown bats aren't very big," said Corey.

"Oh, aren't they?" Ken gold-winged from the dune. "What about those huge African vampire bats that bite holes in your neck and suck out all your blood?"

Sunners and swimmers approached on cautious sand prints.

"I saved it," said Randy, "my raft wasn't inflated so hard I couldn't get it under the wave and lift the little thing safe to shore."

"Blind, poor creature—blind as a bat—" The straw creatures on the woman's sun hat bobbed to her gull-like laughter.

"Bats aren't one bit blind." Corey's coffee brown eyes glittered facts through his red grass hair. "I

read in my bird book that they have eyes, and voices, mostly too high for human ears, and radar better than the navy's best."

"You thirteen-year olds know it all," said the lifeguard.

"Watch out—they can get caught in your hair," said the bobbling woman.

"That's false, too. They can dodge branches and wires and things, catch the tiniest insects just by echoes."

Nina splashed her raft up shore as close to the bat as she could reach; shook her sharp-boned shoulders above it.

"Quit throwing water around, can't you?" Randy's eyes angered green. "You always spoil everything."

Nina stared down with cave pallor, drew back her lip to a push of jagged teeth. "You're bats giving the thing all this attention. Nothing and nobody's worth it."

"Do you suppose those horn hooks in his pointy little ears have anything to do with radar?" Randy asked Corey.

"I wish I knew."

"He's drying orangy. Nothing but pencil dots for a nose, and his face quivers like a pin-size bunny."

Nina crinkled her mustard skin to bat face, reached out a petting finger, curled it back, sharp as the hooks on the bat's folded wings. "A little old mouse, that's what it is—a little old dead mouse." She lifted her raft for launching. "Come on, Corey—race you—"

Corey started on a get-set to the waves, turned back to the minute face.

"My science teacher told me about some guy back in Italy a long time ago, who blinded bats he found in a bell tower—" Ken ran a coated tongue across his thinned mouth—"dug out their eyes to see if they

could fly blind."

"Oh, no—" Randy pressed her hand against her eyes.

"Know what? He dissected them, and found their stomachs crammed with insects."

A woman stilted over on cork beach shoes; beaked down at the bat—"Ugh—ugly—"

"It is not ugly," Randy fiercely—"it's beautiful."

Two women whispered in the broken outer circle. "Impudent, isn't she?"

"That goes for most of the young ones around this club. Overindulged, under disciplined."

"At least her family watches over her. Too many are just dumped. Nina Froman for one — a messy home situation — mother three times divorced, carrying on right now with the cabana boy — if you can call him a boy."

"Ken has a stepfather, doesn't he?" asked another woman curling blood-red nails against sight of the bat.

"No divorce or anything. His own father died, and his stepfather tries to help the boy forget by being his pal—they go fishing together, hunting."

"Guess that flying mouse is a novelty to these rich kids — something they can't charge at the refreshment stand. You should see them stuffing themselves all day — especially Corey—"

Ken turned from crushing sand cliffs under his heels to the fast breathing little bat. "Those hooks on his wings will puncture your raft—ruin it."

"No more than my barrette could. He hangs upside down by them—all cozy in his cave."

Corey explored a finger toward the tiny tucked foot.

"No—no, I wouldn't—" said Randy, "just let him rest."

"Guess you're right. Wish I knew more what to do, if he's hurt I mean, how to make a splint or something."

Ken kicked a spurt of sand across the raft, grains sticking to the bat's wet fur.

"What did you want to do that for?" Randy said. "Leave the little thing alone, can't you?"

Corey got off his knees and started into the surf, dove a wave, swam up out. All this fuss over a fool bat, just the way it was at home with each new baby. Sickening. If you weren't all wrapped up useless, nobody around his house knew you were alive. Even now, at four years old, his brother was the only one who drew a marvelous breath, his baby talk, the way his beetle bugging little mind works, and oh, his hurts, the kissing of his hurts.

A small bird low over the barrels. The bat — was it flying in its little umbrella wings? Down — down — its wings couldn't hold. No, a tern red beaking after a minnow.

Corey raced the waves to shore, tumbling the backwash to the raft; stared at the bat's tiny face quivering like a code he had to read.

"Look — look — he's opening his tuck of a mouth." Randy clasped her hands. "Those teeth, those teeny teeth—no bigger than sand grains. Oh, a tongue, the littlest tongue I ever saw — nothing but a pink splinter. How can anything have a tongue that little, and live?"

"Hear any clicks?" asked a man holding his little boy's kite string.

"Clicks?" Corey pulled at his ear.

"It's the radar that lets them catch an insect every few seconds, or dodge the smallest twig. The quieter you are, and the younger, the more likely you are to hear. It comes

through faint as a lady's wrist watch."

"Honest?" Corey hung an ear to the bat.

"Not now—you just might if he flies."

"Suppose this one little bat were all you had to study, the whole of your life. It could teach you the universe. Even now, it holds mysteries beyond our present knowledge. We may not even be asking the right questions. How can a bat brain no bigger than a pebble know echo language better than a blind man who needs to see with sound, to live?"

"Golly—"

Corey leaned on his elbows again. This pocket bat, this orangy puff, these snips of cartilage, the quiver face, that joke of a tongue—What was it the man said?—It can teach you the universe. A great scientist, that's what he would be — work into the night like the life of Louis Pasteur. He would discover wonder drugs and cures, an unheard of vaccine that would save the entire Eastern seaboard from dying of a terrible new disease, empty hospital beds of hopeless cases. Nobody would need doctors anymore. The little bat grew bigger and bigger with all he was going to be.

"Say, I just thought — bats don't like the sun." Randy shaded the bat with her arms. "They like to fly about in the dark—"

"Even the smallest bat needs lots of study. Maybe some make out all right in the day," said Corey.

Nina swooshed her raft closer to shore, called out, "You still staring at that idiotic thing?" — called to no hearing.

Always a circle about something, a circle you could push through, be a part of, but no part at all.

Wished that bat would die or fly

instead of waiting for her to ride the waves in when it didn't care whether she came or went like coming home from school with nobody around. Mother between husbands, was the worst. Whoever turned up as her new father, she wasn't going to let herself fall for him, never again find a father and lose him, or never quite have him. She closed her eyes and floated the waves, a bat on a raft away and away.

"The thing's half dead—" Ken jarred the raft with his foot — "it won't fly—it will never fly—it's a broken umbrella inside out—*kaput*."

Randy fisted a handful of sand. "Kick that raft once more, and you'll get this right in your eyes."

The bat's face worked in crinkle flashes. Ken grabbed at a wing. Randy jammed her fingers into her mouth, crunched her eyes shut.

"No, you don't." Corey struck down Ken's arm, "That little fellow is special."

"All this moaning over a bat. It's getting ridiculous." Ken dove against the next wave. A Halloween leftover, brick orange as his stepfather's outdoor face, shriveled worse than a shrunken head boiling with sand. Bat helpless — what a way to see a stepfather who bought him everything, took him everywhere. His own father dimming. Used to want his own father so much he would lie in the dark biting his knuckles against missing him, their trails up mountain sides, finding stones and lichen, puffballs that popped purple spores, his father reading aloud to him through the fever: *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Black Arrow*, *Treasure Island* — own father.

Ken swam so far beyond the barrels, the lifeguard whistled him back. From out here, the raft no more than a doodle, the bat a flake of mica.

Almost as if he had thought it out of a cave, and the others were only pretending to see it, too. He rode a white-horse wave — white horse, white hearse. No white horses for his father's hearse. Tried to underwater it away, the death; surfed to the sand cliff like a human raft.

"Keep back—keep back—or you'll get it in the eyes." Randy scooped more sand.

"What do you think you have there? Some sort of archangel disguised as a bat?" Ken lay upsand like Randy and Corey, leaning on his elbows, legs bubbled by surf wash.

"Isn't it a miracle — just?

"A marvel — indeed a marvel," said Ken, "but every marvel eats some other marvel."

Randy watched for the frip of a tongue, the sand-grain teeth. The sea too big to take in quite, the sky too big and blue, stars too far away, but this — this fur thing, this leaf face, point ears — like the first life ever. One small breath on her raft — life she had saved from the big sea — sort of like creating life — well, helping to create it — being in on creation.

Ken swooped like the spotted bird. The bat between his fingers opened its mouth in pain rage, but no cry came out — only her own cry.

Whish, it got free — just as from the spotted bird's beaking; flew jagged. Its radar must not be working well. Stagger circles out over the water — the least wave could grab.

Nina rolled off her raft to stand and watch. "Got away, didn't it? Everything gets away."

"It's flying—it's flying. Its wings are all right." Randy waded into the surf. They all shaded their eyes to its minute flutterings, its *don't know*

where.

"It's down," Nina's voice cold
joyed, "down by the barrels, and
that's that."

Ken cracked his knuckles, kicked
the raft where the bat was, walked
back up the dune.

Corey and Randy still shaded their
eyes against a sun shield of water

out to the barrels, and beyond.

"Guess it's all over." Corey low-
ered his arm.

"He's alive — he's alive. He was
resting on the barrels all the time—"

The little bat curved across the
waves, flying along the sand to a
nothing of light.

The Fourth Category

● Elizabeth Bartlett

Of vegetable, yes
But amorphous
By analogy
To stem
leaf
root
Not a flower
Nor a seed
And no use as fruit.

Of animal, too
But understood
Independently
Of cry
growl
purr
Not a fish
Nor a fowl
And no good as fur.

Of mineral, besides
But disinclined
Organically
To heat
break
pour
Not iso-
Nor meta-morphic
And no worth as ore.

Punchy's Last Fight

● Bernard A. Herbert

At night when the gym doors were closed and the boxers had gone, old Punchy put his harmonica away and shuffled to the locker room. There he stripped off his clothes and, standing naked, his aged body sagging and wrinkling like a crushed cocoon, the skin sickly pale and flaccid, he slipped into a pair of faded purple boxing trunks and laced on, with fumbling fingers, a worn set of ring shoes. Hurriedly, Punchy tied the laces.

All day he had waited for the boxers to leave. Every day he gave them towels, soap, water, buckets; he let them joke at him, crudely, cruelly; he let them punch him in play, as boxers will, cruelly; he let them tease him and shove him and trip him and hurt him. Each day, while the boxers were busy and Punchy could rest, he took out his harmonica and played the few simple tunes he could master. To Punchy the tunes were not simple: they were difficult for a stumbling tongue to sound. He would play the notes and when one would ring clear and true, he would imagine himself upon a stage, backed by a large orchestra, fronted by a gowned and jeweled audience, the clear and true harmonica note filling the air with a clarity never heard before. In his mind Punchy would end the note and bow to the audience as their applause crashed over him like an explosion. And he would bow to the orchestra too.

This day Punchy had not played

very well. His lips had felt stiff and cold, and the muscles had hurt more than ever. But when the boxers had left, and he had put on his old trunks, Punchy felt better. For Punchy lived for this moment at night; that is why he worked in a gym and suffered the abuses from the boxers.

His trunks sliding silkily on his thighs, his ring shoes snug and springy under his toes, his body straightening as erect as it could, old Punchy turned off the locker room and gym ceiling lights and switched on the training ring flood-lamps. At the head of the aisle leading to the ring, he breathed deep and dreamed he was a boxer again.

There was the fight crowd, raucous, primitive, waiting for savagery, hoping for injury and blood and pain. Death would be a climactic event in the life of the fight crowd. The crowd was talking and smoking, and the gym became an arena buzzing with chatter and veiled by a grey cloud rising from cigarettes. The crowd was waiting for old Punchy, impatiently. It began to stamp its feet, clapping in rhythm, chanting: We want Punchy, we want Punchy, we want Punchy, WE WANT PUNCHY.

All right, Punchy thought, I'm coming, I'm coming, take it easy. He jogged down the aisle in the darkness toward the light-flooded ring, hugging an imaginary robe about his shoulders with one hand and waving the other at the crowd,

nodding, winking, smiling at friends, acknowledging their well wishes. Near the ring, where the racket hoodlums sat and eyed him, Punchy grimaced. Lousy punks, he thought, lousy, rotten punks. I'll show them.

He did not break the rhythm of the crowd nor of his jogging as he climbed up to the ring and ducked through the ropes and onto the canvas. Jigging now, almost dancing now, working his arms in time with his feet, Punchy scraped his shoes over a resin box, scraping hard. He could smell the dust now. He could smell the sweat and tobacco smoke of the men, the perfume of the women, the leather of his boxing gloves, the vaseline on his eyebrows. He could hear the crowd now, saying Punchy, Punchy, Punchy in so many different tones, in so many different notes, that soon all he could hear was a long, loud, lone PUNCHY blasting in his ears. Thank you, he said, nodding at the darkness beyond the ring, Thank you, thank you.

In the black gym windows, red neon signs on the avenue outside flickered like matches flaring in a stadium at night. From the avenue an auto horn blared like a time-keeper's warning signal. Trucks rumbled by the gym like thousands of feet stamping for action. The years melted with the fat from Punchy's body, and he was young again, strong again, his eyes and mind clear again, his heart beating excitedly again, and he was warming up drymouthed in a corner while his trainer whispered instructions.

Tonight Punchy had chosen an old opponent: Flash Giordano. Flash was a short-armed left hooker with a soft belly; he was good but not good enough for old Punchy. The hell with the trainer's instructions, Punchy thought; I'm not carrying

this Giordano bum one round. Punchy stuck out his tongue at the ringside hoodlums. The hell with you too, he thought.

A gong clanged in Punchy's brain. He charged out of the corner and blocked a wide left hook and pumped his fists into the soft Giordano belly: one-two-three. He heard Giordano gasp and suck air. Punchy's arms pistoned: one-two-three. Giordano staggered, doubled over. Punchy feinted low, feinted high. Giordano's arms jerked up. Punchy leaped in, crouching, and slammed a straight right to the pit of the stomach. Giordano folded, paralyzed. Punchy danced back, set himself, and threw the best punch he had ever thrown. It crunched Giordano's hanging chin and broke his open, gasping jaws and sent his mouthpiece and teeth flying from the ring.

Giordano dropped, rolled over, lay still. The crowd screamed: PUNCHY. The referee counted. Punchy jigged in a neutral corner, sorry that Giordano had gone down so quickly, wanting him to get up so he could hit the fallen Flash again. And again. And again.

The referee's hands swung out, palms down. The crowd roared: PUNCHY. Punchy flung his right fist high and danced to the center of the ring, grinning at the crowd, deafened by the cheers, feeling his trainer's warning tugs, seeing the ringside hoodlum's scowls, sticking his tongue at them again, then remembering the prone Giordano and walking to his side, kneeling, touching his limp shoulders concernedly, knowing his concern to be false, knowing he wished that Flash Giordano had risen at least once so Punchy could slug him again. And again. And again.

Then Punchy was out of the ring

and down the aisle, past the hoodlums, avoiding them, and back in the safety of the locker room. His chest was tightening again, and suddenly he was alone. No trainer, no seconds, no manager; not even reporters. Punchy did not know whether or not he was dreaming. In the locker room mirror he could see himself clearly; he did not know if he was young and dreaming or old and awake. The mirror showed only a white body and a white, featureless face. Punchy shrugged; the mirror must be steamed by the locker room showers.

But his legs trembled. He sat down, almost collapsing, on a bench near his work clothes. His harmonica protruded from a trouser pocket. Punchy picked up the harmonica, found himself playing it, although he had no wish for music now. He tried to play a tune, almost against his will, but the notes came out sourly. Only one note, at the high end of the harmonica scale, rang true. Punchy tried to play a tune based on that one note, playing it slowly, then staccato, embellishing the note with trills and flourishes. Then he flung the harmonica across the room. Corny, Punchy said, real corny.

Inside his chest the muscles were contracting now, hurting, and he could not rise when the locker room door opened and three ringside hoodlums walked in.

Now I know I'm dreaming, Punchy thought; this has happened to me before: the empty locker room, the hoodlums, the Giordano fight. Punchy grinned; I must be getting punchy.

The hoodlums beat him, not letting him up from the bench, pinning him seated, started on his mouth and nose and eyes and ending on his

head. Then they dumped him onto the floor and fractured his skull. But this time he did not bleed.

But this time it doesn't hurt, Punchy thought. He was lying on the floor, but he was seeing himself from a viewpoint somewhere in the ceiling. And the blows did not hurt at all.

Corny, Punchy thought, real corny. Fail to dump a fight, one-round kayo by the hero, beating by the hoods — I can think up a better one than that. Tomorrow night, he thought, tomorrow night I'll make up a good one. And it won't be corny.

But that Giordano fight, he thought, that Giordano fight really happened to me.

He thought about the boxers and their cruelty. None of them would believe me if I told them about the Giordano fight, he thought; none of them would believe anything about me. But at least he still had the gym and his old trunks and shoes and the ring to himself at night. And his harmonica.

Where was that harmonica? Punchy crawled across the locker room floor and got the harmonica and put it to his lips. Neither his lips nor his tongue nor, for that matter, his breath would work and, remembering, he tried with all his will to concentrate his effort upon that one note at the high end of the scale which had rung true before. Punchy was trying to play the harmonica on the floor and at the same time watching himself try to play from his other viewpoint in the ceiling when, without his breathing or tonguing, a new note, more clear and true than any harmonica note, echoed from wall to wall of the room, beginning softly like a gentle warm breeze and then whirling in a circle of sound, just that one note,

from floor to ceiling and from wall to wall, like a freshening wind, still warm, still gentle, but with great latent force, faster and faster, whirling and whirling, lifting and lifting, until old Punchy was caught up in the sound and whirling with it, one clear and true and higher-than-high note whose force carried him up and away, far, far above the gym and the ring, past clouds of cigarette smoke and perfume scent and horizons of towels and waterbuckets into a tremendous amphitheater whose ceiling was limitless and whose audience was infinite and whose stage was crowded with a giant orchestra. And the whirling power of the higher-than-high note spun Punchy gently onto a podium, facing the audience with his harmonica at his lip, with the note ringing with an immaculate clarity, the giant orchestra blending into the note with soft, stringed chords, the audience, white-gowned, murmuring appreciatively, applauding politely, until Punchy was sure he could play the note happily through eternity.

And, almost inaudibly, above his head, there was a whisper of a wing.

In the morning when the gym doors were opened, the boxers found Punchy's body on the floor. One of the boxers, an amateur, kicked Punchy's ribs, thinking he was sleeping. An older boxer, a professional, felt Punchy's pulse and knew he was dead.

"Hell," the professional said, "Geez!"

"What's he doing in those trunks?" asked the amateur.

"How the hell do I know?" said the professional.

The amateur kicked the bench next to Punchy's body and kicked his locker door, ashamed to have kicked a dead body and angry at Punchy for dying and leaving a dead body that could be kicked.

The professional stood staring at dead Punchy, hoping he'd never be foolish enough to doublecross a syndicate, hoping he'd never be beaten punchdrunk, hoping he'd never die in a gym.

Both of the boxers, though, could understand why Punchy was wearing his trunks. They would not be able to explain why, but somehow they knew.



The Soviets Say

● Marion Montgomery

In that popular phrase that announces to startle, "The Soviets say";
Except that this time — in our favor, the poets':

The Soviets say that peculiar Phobos and Deimos are spheres that
are possibly hollow; that the Martians built Heaven
before us;

And further the Soviets are saying that an Unknown Force in the
cosmos makes Earth really heart-shaped

(In our favor: oh, science support the poets);

Next, a probe with a camera, then man; while we languish in envy.

For us (and us poets), here's a probe of a man before theirs or their
camera's:

What they'll find in vegetive being with the power of angels,
The Vegetive Angels who, the air getting thinner or suburbs more
crowded, willed to circle their choking green planet;
(*Willed* satellites up, not *thrust* them with rockets: the point is
important)

Got out while the getting was good, as we put it;

Or more properly, *in*—

Got *in* the sealed balls of their will as the good angel may;
Launched out, as the good angel may, to the pearly-pyrenean.

And from two million thin years ago, cling like soft fungus to the
whirling concave, the bubble of will,

Till some scientist with hammer and sickle (as we suppose he might
do any time now)

Bursts the bubble of theory to old leering fact.

At which point the intense, clinging vegetive angels will decay into
nothing, not even to dust as our mummies when opened,
Which no doubt will give all of us the millesium pause that is needed
To guess what it is that the rocket opposes—

Some heart-shaping force?

Oh, art has its day:

Art praise a balance to pride, we will say.

And the us, if I know us by now, will turn patron, have Congress
provide several billion for artists whose poems and novels
and oils will be critically called (be envoked)
"Most Vegetive Angel"

The Soviets will say then?

The Soviets will say that they find, hitherto unperceived, this
quick poem on the walls of dear Phobos and Deimos

And in one hear-shaped form or another

signed Job

and signed Homer,

signed Shakespeare

Signed finally Pasternak.

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